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CONTACT
William Pitman
william.pitman@state.ma.us



Governor Baker, MBTA Launch RIDE Pilot Program with Uber, Lyft

Innovative ride-share partnership offers on-demand options for paratransit customers

WATERTOWN – Governor Charlie Baker joined Massachusetts Department of Transportation Secretary and CEO Stephanie Pollack, MBTA managers, disability advocates, and executives with Uber and Lyft today to launch a first-of-its-kind innovative pilot program with ride-share companies to save costs and deliver customers of the MBTA's, THE RIDE, options for on-demand service through their smartphones.

"The reliability of our transportation system depends on the MBTA's ability to improve its core infrastructure and provide efficient, innovative transit options that meet the needs of the system's one million daily riders," **said Governor Baker.** "This initiative represents the MBTA's efforts to increase accessibility in a more cost-effective and efficient way that also delivers more convenient service for its paratransit customers."

The On-Demand Paratransit Pilot Program will allow the MBTA to learn and understand the opportunities and challenges of incorporating on-demand paratransit options into public transit, and follows a program launched in January with multiple Boston-area taxi providers to subsidize trips for RIDE users via cab. Customers unable to use a smartphone or without access to one can book rides by using a phone-in option from Lyft or obtain a smart phone from Uber on a limited basis.

“We want to meet the needs of our customers to help them get to where they are going efficiently and that is why we are increasing investments in the core transit system and introducing innovative options for our paratransit customers,” **said Secretary Pollack**. “This pilot takes a major step toward providing the kind of flexibility, responsiveness and on-demand customer service that has been the focus of our reforms, and that our paratransit riders deserve.”

The pilot is also part of the MBTA’s efforts to deliver more efficient and cost-effective service. Current RIDE service comes at a variable cost of \$31 to the MBTA, a \$3.15 set fare for customers and a minimum of one day advance notice required. Ride-share pilot participants will have on-demand service available via their smartphone app or the phone-in option and pay the first \$2.00 of the trip. The MBTA will pick up the next \$13.00 of the trip, with the customer picking up any remaining trip costs.

Today’s event was held at the Perkins School for the Blind which helped initiate the pilot, working closely with disability advocates and the MBTA. Joining Governor Baker and Secretary Pollack for the announcement were MBTA Interim General Manager Brian Shortsleeve, Perkins’ President and CEO Dave Power, Perkins’ Chief Financial Officer Lisa Calise, (who was appointed to the MBTA’s Fiscal and Management Control Board by Governor Baker last year), and the Boston General Managers for Uber and Lyft.

“This collaborative effort between the MBTA, our partners at Uber and Lyft, Perkins, and so many others shows how we can use private market innovation and emerging technology to enhance service and accessibility for our riders,” **said Interim General Manager Shortsleeve**. “The MBTA will continue to explore opportunities like these to reduce costs and provide flexible transit options while investing in the core system.”

As part of the pilot, Lyft will partner with a local Americans with Disabilities Act/Non-Emergency Medical Transportation firm to provide wheelchair accessible rental vehicles to Lyft drivers. To incentivize the supply of wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road, the MBTA will offer an additional \$12 per completed trip to those Lyft drivers using an accessible rental. Uber currently has wheelchair accessible vehicles through its UberACCESS program that will be available for the MBTA pilot.

“We are honored to be working with the MBTA to improve convenient and reliable transportation options for their customers, our riders,” **said Uber Boston General Manager, Chris Taylor**. “Uber’s technology has helped expand access to convenient transportation options, while improving mobility and independence for thousands of people across the Commonwealth,”

“Lyft is proud to bring on-demand transportation to customers of The RIDE,” **said**

Tyler George, General Manager of Lyft Boston. “This partnership with the MBTA marks an exciting next step in enhancing and expanding The RIDE’s service by reducing passenger wait times and increasing access to jobs, education, errands, and social activities.”

Driver-partners will undergo third-party safety screenings, vehicle and criminal background record checks and receive educational materials on providing service for RIDE customers with accessibility needs. Uber and Lyft will also offer sessions to train driver-partners to better serve pilot customers.

“Independent, reliable transportation is critical for people with disabilities to get to work, school or other community activities on time,” **said Dave Power, President and CEO of Perkins School for the Blind.** “Para-transit riders can now access the same on-demand services enjoyed by people without disabilities – bringing us another step closer to inclusive public transportation.”

Interested RIDE customers are encouraged to participate by [visiting the MBTA’s website](#) for more information and signing up with both Uber and Lyft to maximize participation. RIDE-eligible users approved for the pilot will receive app access to request on-demand services.

“We are excited to see THE RIDE expand customer options and efficiencies, with a commitment to long-term accessibility options,” **said Bill Henning, Director of the Boston Center for Independent Living.**

“Thousands of seniors who are no longer able to use fixed route service rely on The RIDE for their transportation needs but as costs have escalated it has become important to explore new options to meet those needs,” **said Carolyn Villers, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Senior Action Council.** “This pilot is an important step forward because it has the potential to improve access to responsive service while also providing a more cost-effective model.”

“AACT is looking forward to working with Lyft/Uber and the MBTA in providing an additional transportation resource to the disability community on the RIDE program,” **said James White, Chairman of the Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA.**

The RIDE provides an average of 7,000 daily trips, with demand set to grow as the senior population continues to expand. Customers over 65 years of age account for about 60% of RIDE users and 9% require wheelchair-accessible vehicles. The RIDE currently provides door-to-door transit service for individuals in a 712-mile-square area that includes 60 cities and towns and over 2.5 million people unable to access or use the MBTA’s fixed-route system. Users of The RIDE are required to book trips one

day in advance. For more information on The RIDE paratransit program, including service area, [click here](#).

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